



HOW TO RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE IN CHRISTCHURCH

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CANTERBURY MUSEUM
New Zealand Natural & Human Heritage



Introduction

This pamphlet gives a brief outline of where to look for information, and what can be found.

The history of a house is not just about the building itself. People bought the land, built the house, and lived in it, influencing its shape and structure by their activities. Usually there are no pre-existing written histories, so active investigation using a variety of resources is needed.

Although this information is specifically for Christchurch houses, the principles can be applied to other areas.



A E Preece photograph
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 1987.284.1



Lovell Smith collection
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 1950.80.12

To get the most out of other sources of information it is advisable to first search the title of a property back to the original purchaser of the land. This will give you the names of the people who owned the property. Knowing these names is a good starting point for finding out more of the history of the house.

Cover image (top) Huntsbury cobb cottage
Credit: W A Taylor collection
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 1968.213.71

Cover image (bottom) Unidentified bungalow
Credit: Canterbury Museum
Ref: 19XX.2.568

Land

The following resources provide information about the land and changes to it, as structures were built on it, demolished or altered over time.

CERTIFICATES OF TITLE are a record of who owned the land and on what date they purchased it. Also on the title are references to legal documents associated with ownership such as mortgages, wills and transfers. These can provide interesting supplementary information. Titles can be searched from the present owner back to the first person to purchase that piece of land, or vice versa. Prior to the issue of titles, land ownership was managed through the deeds system. The Deeds registers can be seen at Land Information New Zealand. Sometimes a mortgage on the title can suggest when a building was built.

Certificates of title, land deeds and the associated documents mentioned on the certificate of title can be researched at Land Information New Zealand. They have a very helpful pamphlet, *Searching a title*, and a very informative website at www.linz.govt.nz. Some of the older discharged mortgages and wills are held at Archives New Zealand, Christchurch. There is a full index to these. Also held there, are copies of Crown Grants which were the documents used by the New Zealand Government to grant ownership of land. They are indexed up to about 1880 and record the first person to purchase that piece of land from the Government.

RATING AND VALUATION

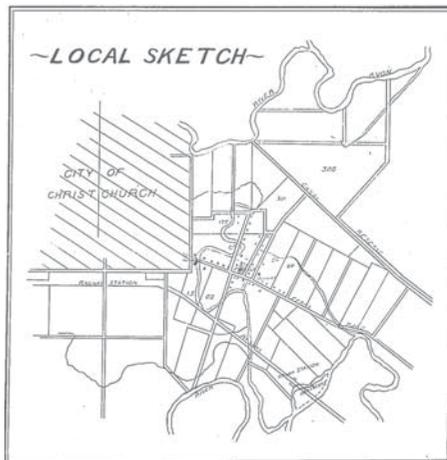
ROLLS are records of who was living on the property, the value of the land and existing buildings. Local Body rating and valuation rolls for Christchurch are held at

Archives New Zealand Christchurch Office. They also hold government valuation records from about 1910. When the Valuation Department was abolished in the 1990s, other agencies (including private firms) took over this valuation function. Some of these private agencies hold data on houses which sometimes includes a sketch of the house layout and estimate of the age. See the Telecom Yellow Pages for details.

MAPS can sometimes show the outline of buildings. Sale plans, which give details of the properties sold and sometimes have sketches or photographs on them, have occasionally survived. The largest collection of maps and sale plans is at Canterbury Museum. Maps and survey plans can be seen at Land Information New Zealand.



Bungalows, suburban Christchurch
Stan McKay photograph
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 1980.192.23



Detail from sale plan of Ferry Road building sites
J T Smith & Co, 1878
Canterbury Museum
Ref:CMU661

Houses

Establishing the date that a house was built is often a combination of research, deduction and educated guessing.

Examining the building carefully can give valuable clues to its history and date of erection. Check behind mantelpieces, cupboards, newspaper linings on floors and walls for clues to the dates of additions or alterations, either in the form of newspapers, documents, or actual writing on the walls, frames or architraves.

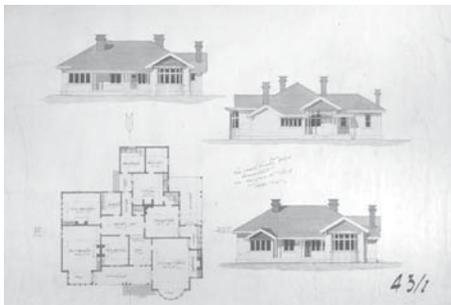
Dating the house by its architectural style can be difficult. Two useful reference books are *The age of houses illustrated*, by M B Cooke, and *Old New Zealand houses 1800-1940*, by Jeremy Salmond.

The New Zealand Historic Places Trust has information files on

registered buildings and houses. These can be seen at the Southern regional office or check their website www.historic.org.nz

The Christchurch City Council Urban Design and Heritage Unit has approximately 600 files – one for each building listed in the City Plan. Also included in the files are photographs, newspaper cuttings, copies of certificates of titles and information about architects and Council reports. The names of buildings which are listed can be found in volume 3 of the City Plan. This can be seen at Christchurch City Libraries.

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS AND ARCHITECTS. Sadly not many domestic housing plans have survived. Canterbury Museum has a collection available to the public; the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury also has a collection,



134 Hereford Street, Christchurch
Roy Lovell Smith architectural plan
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 1980.78.2

and Archives NZ, Christchurch holds plans mainly of state houses. The Christchurch City Council Urban Design and Heritage Unit has a collection of historical architectural plans which are indexed. It is possible to search these by address, architect or name of building.

Unless a plan has survived, the chances of finding out who the architect was, are slim. Similarly, copies of building specifications are rare. The University of Canterbury Art History Department has compiled extensive files on architects and there are theses and books on

architects and architecture available at Christchurch City Libraries.

PHOTOGRAPHS. Photographs can show a wealth of detail. Canterbury Museum has a large collection of photographs arranged by areas, and for the central city, by streets. The Aotearoa New Zealand Centre has a growing number of photographs. Local illustrated newspapers such as the *Canterbury Times* and *Weekly Press* may prove helpful, and there is an index to illustrations at Canterbury Museum and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre. Aerial photographs can show the changes to the outline of houses and the subdivision of properties.

DRAINAGE PLANS. The Environmental Services Unit of the Christchurch City Council has records of the drainpipes laid to a house, which can usually give the date the house was first connected to the sewer.

From information on the block plans, it is possible to check the Drainage Inspector's pick-ups which often have an outline sketch of the building, and are helpful for finding out when alterations involving drainage were made to the building. The Environmental Services Unit charges a search fee for this service.

BUILDING PERMITS.

Unfortunately most house plans relating to permits issued prior to about 1960 have been destroyed. At the Environmental Services Unit, the surviving records can give an idea of recent alterations and additions. Time-consuming, but worthwhile checking if you can estimate the date of construction, are the building permit registers, held at Archives New Zealand, covering 1907-1964. These record the architect, the builder, and who the house was built for. While state houses did not require building permits, Archives New

Zealand holds information about state housing subdivisions and these documents can give an indication of the standard layout proposed for the house.

NEWSPAPERS. Check around the time of sale, there may be an advertisement which will give information. There may also be tender notices published in the paper prior to its construction.



Newspaper advertisement from The Star, Christchurch 9 August 1902
Canterbury Museum
Ref: Pg 8

Newspapers and newspaper indexes are held in the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre including an index to houses featured in *The Press* newspaper for the last 15 years.

BOOKS. Many books have been published giving designs for houses or looking at New Zealand's architectural heritage. Local histories can give the background of an area, when it was subdivided, and the changes

over the years of settlement. A search through the Christchurch City Libraries' catalogue on their website:

library.christchurch.org.nz will suggest titles and authors. Their publication, *Local history resources*, is especially useful for finding out about the history of suburbs. It is also available on their website.

Finding out about people

Researching the people who owned or lived in the house can not only provide information about the property, but give flesh to the bones. Indexes of useful biographical information are at the Canterbury Museum, and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre. See the Christchurch City Library website for detailed instructions on how to find out about people. For information about people in

the nineteenth century, of particular note is the unpublished *G R Macdonald dictionary of Canterbury biographies* held at the Canterbury Museum.

STREET DIRECTORIES. Street directories are handy for finding out when people took up residence, but be wary as names are often wrong, and the entry in the directory can be a couple of

Lavery Robt. Jun, miller	55 Searle Wm, butcher's ass	20 Henderson Wm Murray,
De Vries Gerard, engr. Otago	57 Cook Wm, carrier	carpenter
Stewart Wm, auctioneer	59 Stewart Hy. Alex, carpent	28 McCreavy Mrs Amy
Fairbairn Andw (F, Wright & Co)	60 Mearns Thos, coachbuilder	34 Peachley Mrs Agnes, contr
Samuda Chas & G, salesman	63 Chalmer's Jno, motorman	36 Stalling Jno, tanner
Colwell Wm Arscott, salesman	65 Schumacher Andw, hair	40 Virtue Jas Thos, fruiter
Nelson Jno, draper's ass Nursery rd	42 Young Wm, Henderson,
Seymour Stanley Briscoe (S & Son)	71 Jenkins Edgar Hy, organ	butcher; & p r
..... Northern railway intersects.	73 Turner Jas, printer	43 Trough Alex, fruiter (p r)
Hampshire Geo H (Pletcher, Humphreys & Co)	75 Harris Wm Fredk, gardner	46 Dunnington Geo, mangle
Brown Chas Henry, cont AMP	77 Woods Wm, corn dealer	chomist
Smith Chas, gardener Church st	49 Dunnington Geo Harly,
Crowshaw Jno, traveller	Linwood Congregational Chh	chomist (p r)
Deurien Miss Madeline	79 Ferguson Esq, pastor	50 Smart Mrs Ellen
Worsley Mrs Fanny	Parvic Chas Leo, storeman	52 March Jas K, jr, superin-
Kindergarten School	81 Collins Charles, cutter	intendent village settlements
Inwood Miss Mary	83 Oloo Geo, overrid foreman	Maric Geo Edwin, bank off
..... Cuddles ls intersects	85 Sooter Mrs Mary Ann	79 Barrett How (Jas & AId),
Russell Thos G, solicitor here is Matheson rd	cont merchants
McCombs Jas, draper's ass	Fuller Jas, bootmaker	Barrett Jas (B Bros)
St Barnabas Church, Eng	Mason Thos, cutter here is Osborne st
Murray-Aynley Mrs Blanche	Oliver Mrs Christina	84 Meecher Jas, bootmaker
Gerard Miss Kate & Rose	City Council Stone Yard	86 Allen Geo Alex, motorcycle
..... here is Clyde rd	97 Street Wm, carpenter	paper
..... Upper Riccarton	George B, patent mud vendor	100 Bennock Fredk Peter,
Ferry road, Linwood Oliviers rd	tabacconist
Left side from Fitzgerald av	Geor Francis, farmer	102 Pam Arth, clerk N Z R
3 Hangerby Chas, plasterer	Hobson Wm, hairdresser (p r)	108 Hunt Alex, tailor
5 Topping Jas, joiner	Anthony Jas, french polisher	110 Holloway Geo, engr
7 Bull Fresh Herb, salesman	Roberts Alex, musician	114 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
11 Anderson Mrs Jessie here is Cambridge st	118 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
Anderson James, carpenter	Davis Jas, bootmaker; & p r	120 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
13 Vallone Mrs Ann	Wallis Robt, photographer	122 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
15 Hissott Jno, hairdresser	Walters Thos Jno, range mstr	124 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
17 Burch Wm, iron and saddle	129 Ives Chas, salesman	126 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
21 Lawrence Esq, carpenter	Hirst Mrs Jas, store	128 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
23 Fitzgerald Wm, ironway	Grant & MacDonald, Chh	130 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
employee Nursery Co	132 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
25 Tattersall Henry, tailor	Grant Wm Lake (Grant & MacDonald)	134 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
27 DeWolf Geo, labourer right of way	136 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
29 Wain Mrs Mary	Edmonds Thos Wm, baking	138 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
31 Mills Chas, painter	powder mstr; (p r)	140 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
33 Mills Mrs Hannah	Cookson Thos Fredk, carrier	142 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
35 Lawrence How (Francis & Arth), tobacconist & p r here are Oliveville & Woodlark	144 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
37 Lewis Isaac, fancy goods here are Junction & Wilson	146 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
39 Lewis Isaac, fruiter	roads	148 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
41 Scott & King, bookbinder	Right side from Junction at	150 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
43 King Jno W (Wid & K)	2 Ashwell Jas, grocer	152 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
45 Fine Mrs	3 Moberly Matt, electrician	154 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
47 The Wesley Edwld, motor	37 Cook & Son (David T), engr	156 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
49 Croxson Wm, slater	15 Doxley Mrs Caroline	158 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
51 Scott Geo Elix, hairdress here is Lambton	160 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
53 Valler Mrs Elix here is Parkus st	162 Bawa Noodal Jacobson,
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Wise's Canterbury, Marlborough, Nelson and Westland Directory 1907-1908
Canterbury Museum

Ref: Pg 49

years out. To add to the confusion, street names and numbers also changed. Street directories also list occupation, and finding out who the neighbours were can shed an interesting light on things. A full set on microfiche (1872-1954) can be seen at the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre.

LETTERS AND DIARIES, BUSINESS RECORDS. It is often worth checking at repositories whether any original documents belong to people who lived in the house have survived. Sometimes the actual building of the house is detailed in a diary, for example, and other information can be gleaned from these sources. Canterbury Museum and the Aotearoa New Zealand Centre are good places to start. Archives New Zealand may have files about properties which previously belonged to government departments including railways houses.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE. Talking to neighbours, long standing residents of the area, and even getting in touch with the families of previous owners can be a fantastic source of information. Remember, however, that people's memories can be fallible.

Recommended reading

- Cochran, Christopher, 1980. *Restoring a New Zealand house*. New Zealand Historic Places Trust.
- Cooke, M B, 1972. *The age of houses illustrated*. Lincoln College, Farm Management and Rural Valuation Department.
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- Salmond, Jeremy, 1986. *Old New Zealand houses 1800-1940*. Reed Methven, Auckland.
- Wilson, John, 1989. *Christchurch, swamp to city: a short history of the Christchurch Drainage Board 1875-1989*. Christchurch Drainage Board, Lincoln.
- Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Volume III, 1903. The Cyclopaedia Co. Ltd.

Christchurch City Libraries, 2003. *Local history resources: an annotated bibliography of sources on the history of Christchurch, Lyttelton and Banks Peninsula*.



W H Harris collection
Canterbury Historical Association collection
Canterbury Museum
Ref: 2000.199.1104

Addresses

Christchurch City Council
Urban Design and Heritage Unit
Environmental Services Unit
163-173 Tuam Street
PO Box 237
Christchurch
Telephone 941 8999
Email info@ccc.govt.nz
Website www.ccc.govt.nz

Aotearoa New Zealand Centre
Central City Library
Christchurch City Libraries
Nga Kete Whanga-o-Otautahi
Corner Gloucester Street and Oxford
Terrace
PO Box 4438
Christchurch
Telephone 941 7923
Email library@ccc.govt.nz
Website library.christchurch.org.nz

Archives New Zealand
Te Whare Tohu Tuhituhinga o Aotearoa
Christchurch Regional Office
90 Peterborough Street
PO Box 642
Christchurch
Telephone 377 0760
Email christchurch@archives.govt.nz
Website www.archives.govt.nz

Macmillan Brown Library
University of Canterbury
University Drive Ilam
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch
Telephone 366 7001
Website library.canterbury.ac.nz

Canterbury Museum
Documentary Research Centre
Rolleston Avenue
Christchurch
Telephone 366 5000
Email docinfo@canterburymuseum.com

Land Information New Zealand
Toitu Te Whenua
Torrens House, 195 Hereford Street
Private Bag 4721
Christchurch
Telephone 0800 665 463
Website www.linz.govt.nz

New Zealand Historic Places Trust
Pouhere Taonga
Southern Regional Office
Gough House
90 Hereford Street
PO Box 4403
Christchurch
Telephone 365 2897
Website www.historic.org.nz

There is a great interest in researching the history of houses in the United Kingdom and a number of websites are devoted to this subject. One of the best is www.house-detectives.co.uk The BBC also hosts a site with general advice on how to go about this sort of research at www.bbc.co.uk/history/yourhistory/local/home



Canterbury Museum
Ref: 19XX.2.569



CANTERBURY MUSEUM

New Zealand Natural & Human Heritage

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Open every day
9.00 am – 5.00 pm (April – September)
9.00 am – 5.30 pm (October – March)

ISBN 0-908650-17-5
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